

# ROBIN WILLIAMS



**W**hen a young Robin Williams was voted 'Most Likely To Succeed' and 'Most Humorous In Class' by his fellow high school students in San Francisco's Marin County in the late 60s, I wonder if they realised just how accurate their predictions for their classmate were.

It seems that Williams has established himself as a major acting force over a very short space of time, able to turn his hand from the broad comedy of "Good Morning, Vietnam", to the lightweight kids' entertainment of "Popeye" and high dramatic roles in films like "The World According To Garp" and "Awakenings" (at a cinema near you now).

Many people might be tempted to view Robin Williams as just a stand-up comedian who by a lot of luck and careful career moves has

won the fame he enjoys today, but underneath that manic exterior, it's my belief that a serious actor is desperate to get out. Now the versatile Robin returns to video in the comedy "Cadillac Man" (available now from 20:20 Vision). In this, he appears as used car salesman Joey O'Brien, who finds himself threatened with several romantic crises, crippling financial troubles and problems with his tearaway teenage daughter...all in the space of seven days!

Forty year old Robin was born in 1951 in Chicago, and, as the son of a car firm executive, saw much of the United States throughout his early years as his father's job entailed much relocating. The Williams family eventually ended up in Marin County, San Francisco, where Robin briefly attended Claremont Mens' College and Marin College before being offered a full scholarship at New York's prestigious Juilliard Academy. There, he spent three years studying drama under the late John Houseman.

Returning home to San Francisco after college, he joined a comedy workshop where he started working on a freeform improvisation act. Gaining some success, he moved to Los Angeles and further honed his work at The Comedy Store.

By late 1977, he'd made his TV debut in "Laugh-In",

which was shortly followed by the first appearance of the character Mork on the immensely popular "Happy Days". The public loved the character so much that the rainbow tank-topped Ork native was given his own series "Mork And Mindy" little under a year later and the phrase 'ne nanu nanu' entered the vocabulary!

A move into films seemed inevitable and Williams made his movie debut in 1980 playing the title character in Robert Altman's screen version of "Popeye" for Walt Disney. Despite his best efforts and those of a supporting cast including the likes of Shelley Duvall, the film was dull as dishwater and flopped horribly.

A change of pace was called for and came in "The World According To Garp" two years later, a dazzling if somewhat loose adaptation of John Irving's novel of the same name. Robin appeared as doomed New England writer T S Garp, while Glenn Close shone in her movie debut as Garp's eccentric nurse mother. If anybody had

been tempted to write Williams off as a mere flash in the pan, here was the evidence that he could actually act and very well, too.

"The Survivors" (1983) was slightly less of an acting triumph for Robin thanks to a rather flat, scattershot script from Michael Leeson. He stars opposite Walter Matthau as one of a pair of unemployed men who witness a robbery and are told they will be 'fixed' as they are able to identify the culprit. Williams' character decides to arm himself to the teeth in order to combat any assault in this mildly amusing black comedy cum social satire.

Williams' portrayal of a Russian musician who decides to defect to the West while shopping in New York's Bloomingdale's Store in "Moscow On The Hudson" was more roundly acclaimed by the critics and public alike. He gave a good performance as the soviet outsider attempting to come to terms with a new life in a new land.

Not quite so memorable is "Club Paradise" (1986),



**Left: Williams in "Good Morning Vietnam". Right: as Popeye with Shelley Duvall as Olive Oyl. Far right: Williams' new movie "Awakenings."**





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which cast Williams as a Chicago fireman who goes into partnership with Jimmy Cliff in the hope of turning a run down shack into a beach resort on an idyllic West Indian isle. It's not that it's badly acted—in fact, both Williams and reggae singer Cliff give more than adequate performances in their roles—it's just that the film lacks a punchy script and quite the number of laughs to make it go with a real swing.

Another strong performance from Williams came in "Seize The Day", in which he appeared as Tommy Wilhelm, a businessman nearing 40 and desperately down on his luck, much abused and aching for love. It's not a widely known film, but if you can get a copy on sell-through, it's well worth a look, especially if you happen to be one of Robin's fans.

Robin's career picked up with a bang with two great hits one after the other: he received Academy award nominations for his role as madcap DJ Adrian Cronauer in the intermittently hilarious "Good Morning, Vietnam"

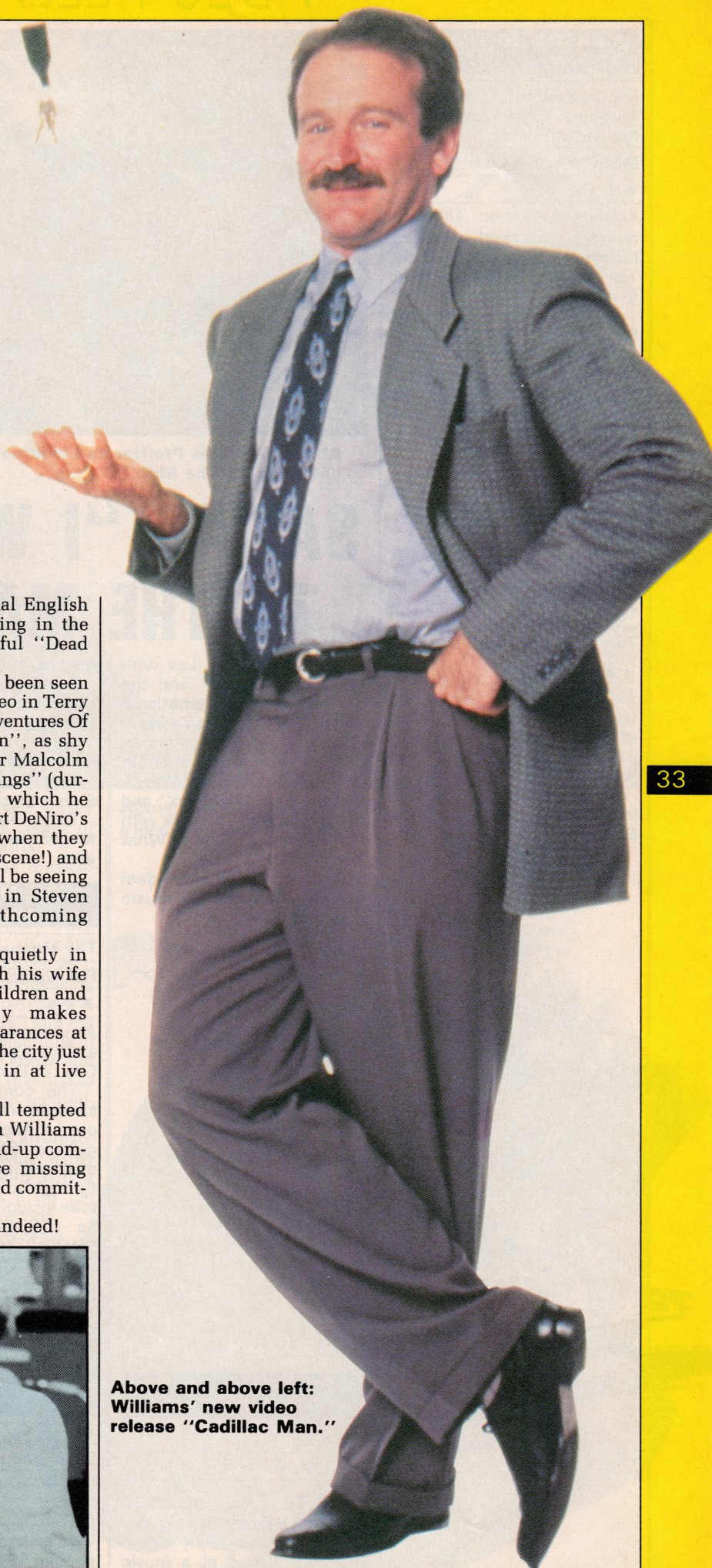
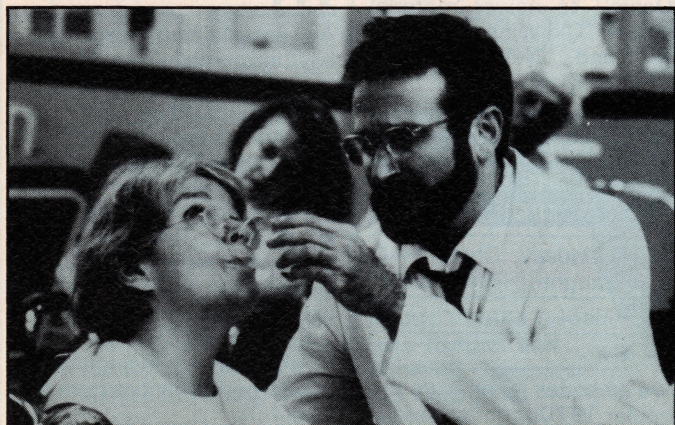
and as inspirational English teacher John Keating in the massively successful "Dead Poets' Society".

Since then, he's been seen in an unbilled cameo in Terry Gilliam's "The Adventures Of Baron Munchausen", as shy but brilliant doctor Malcolm Sayer in "Awakenings" (during the making of which he broke co-star Robert DeNiro's nose by accident when they were rehearsing a scene!) and for the future, we'll be seeing him as Peter Pan in Steven Spielberg's forthcoming "Hook".

Williams lives quietly in San Francisco with his wife and two young children and still occasionally makes unscheduled appearances at comedy venues in the city just to keep his hand in at live performance.

If anybody is still tempted to think that Robin Williams is still a 'mere' stand-up comedian, then they're missing out on a sterling and committed serious actor.

Ne nanu nanu, indeed!



Above and above left: Williams' new video release "Cadillac Man."